

GO HIGHER
West Yorkshire

Higher Education Transition Pack for Disabled Learners



Developed by:

Go Higher West Yorkshire

A partnership of 13 Higher Education Providers offering university degrees, college-based HE courses, and degree apprenticeships including: Bradford College; University of Bradford; University Centre Calderdale College; University of Huddersfield; Kirklees College; Leeds Conservatoire; University of Leeds; Leeds Arts University; Leeds Beckett University; Leeds College of Building; University Centre Leeds; Leeds Trinity University; University Centre at the Heart of Yorkshire Education Group.

Disclaimer

Please note, the information in this pack is designed to provide generic guidance to support the application/transition process into Higher Education. To find out specific information about how a university or Higher Education provider can support you and your individual needs, please contact the Higher Education provider directly. The information in this pack is correct at time of writing—March 2025

Contents

Introduction	3
What Is Higher Education?	5
Higher Education in Further Education (HE in FE)	7
Higher and Degree Apprenticeships	9
Busting Myths & Worries	11
Step-by-Step: Your Journey to University	13
• Explore Your Options (Research Stage)	13
• Decide on Your Course & Where to Apply (Application Stage)	15
• Student Finance	18
• Find the Right Place to Live (Accommodation Stage)	17
• Prepare for University Life (Transition Stage)	20
You're not alone: Support is there for you	25
Your Next Steps Checklist	27
Useful Links	29

Introduction

Welcome to your Higher Education Transition Pack for Disabled Learners. If you're 16–19 years old and have a disability, long-term health or mental health condition, or a learning difficulty, this pack is here to support you. Thinking about university or college is exciting but can also feel overwhelming. Don't worry – we'll walk you through it step by step in a friendly, approachable way.

Going into Higher Education (HE) – whether at a university, a college, or through an apprenticeship – can be a rewarding experience. This guide will help you decide if HE is right for you and explain how to get there, especially if you have a disability or additional needs. We'll explain key terms and processes, give examples, and highlight tips along the journey.

Disabled? What That Means for You

Before we get into Higher Education, let's talk about **what having a disability means** – because understanding this can help you access the right **financial support, accommodation, and other help**.

What counts as a disability? In higher education, "disability" covers a wide range of conditions. This includes physical or sensory impairments, long-term health issues, mental health conditions, and learning differences like dyslexia, ADHD, or autism. It doesn't have to be visible – if a condition affects your daily life, you can get support.

Even if you don't see yourself as disabled, if you've had help at school or college (like extra time or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)), tell your university or college so they can support you too.

Telling universities on your UCAS form:

When you apply through UCAS, you'll be asked if you have a disability. It's helpful to tick that box so universities can plan support. It won't affect your application – admissions staff don't see this information. It goes to the support team, so help can be arranged early.

Student Finance & DSA: If you live in England, you'll apply for student loans through Student Finance England (SFE) to help cover tuition fees and living costs. If you're a disabled student, you can also apply for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) – extra, non-repayable support for things like equipment, software, or study assistance. (We'll explain DSA in more detail later, but be aware that it's available and make sure to apply for it if you're eligible.)



Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP):

An EHCP is a document from school/college (for those up to age 25) outlining your educational, health, and care needs. EHCPs usually end when you move into Higher Education – they don't automatically carry over to university. However, it's useful to share your EHCP (or a summary of it) with the university's disability team so they understand what has helped you in the past. Even without an EHCP, universities must provide reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010. They will work with you to create a support plan that meets your needs.

Top Tips:

- ✓ Send a copy of your EHCP to the disability support services at your chosen university early (after you get an offer, or even during enquiries). This helps them start planning your support.
- ✓ Use your EHCP as a personal checklist of support you need. For example, if it says you need 1:1 learning support or assistive technology, discuss those needs with the university to see what they can provide.
- ✓ Keep your own copy of the EHCP. Once you leave school or college, it's your responsibility to share relevant information with the university – your school/college or local authority won't automatically send it for you.

💡 Key Points:

- ✓ This guide will walk you through the process of moving into Higher Education in a step-by-step, friendly way.
- ✓ "Disabled" in HE can refer to a wide range of conditions – if you've had any additional support in school or college, make sure to let your university know so they can support you.
- ✓ Disclosing your disability on your UCAS application is important to get support in place and will not hurt your chance of admission.
- ✓ If you have an EHCP or similar plan from school, share it with your university's support services to help them understand and meet your needs.



What Is Higher Education?

Higher Education (HE) is a term for any study you do after age 18 (once you finish school or college). It can happen at a **university**, a **college**, or even as part of a job (like an apprenticeship).

HE isn't one single path – it covers a variety of qualifications. For example, common HE routes include:

- **Bachelor's degrees** (usually 3 years courses at university in a subject you love).
- **Foundation degrees** or HNDs (shorter courses, often 2 years).
- **Higher apprenticeships or degree apprenticeships** (work and study combined – you earn a wage and get a qualification).
- **Other higher-level courses** – like diplomas, or programmes at a **conservatoire** (specialist performance institution, e.g. Leeds Conservatoire for music/drama).

As a disabled student, you can pursue any of these routes. Universities and colleges have a duty to support disabled students and make reasonable adjustments so you can succeed. So don't let that worry or hold you back – focus on the subject and type of study that excite you!

How is HE different from what you do at school/college?

In HE, you usually have **more independence**. For example, fewer classroom hours than school, more **research and study on your own**, and you get to focus on subjects **you choose**. You call your teachers **“lecturers”** or **“tutors”**, and you'll be treated as an adult (which is great, but means managing your own time and work). Don't worry – support is still there (we'll cover that)!

Different learning style: Teaching in HE can happen through lectures (a professor teaching a large group), seminars (small group discussions), labs or workshops (for practical subjects), and a lot of independent reading or project work.

You'll have assessments like essays, presentations, or exams (and sometimes practical projects), depending on your course. If you have a disability, one key difference is you'll need to speak up about the support you need – for example, arranging adjustments with the university's disability support team – whereas in school this was often handled for you by teachers or support staff.

Don't be afraid: universities want to help you succeed, and later in this pack we'll explain how to get your support set up.

Why Consider HE? Is it worth it?

HE isn't "just more school" – it's a **chance to grow**, learn skills, and open doors. Let's look at some great reasons to think about going to uni or college:

- 👉 **Follow your passion:** Study something you are really interested in – anything from engineering to art to nursing to game design. HE lets you dive deep into what you love.
- 👉 **Better career options:** Many higher-level jobs ask for a degree or similar. On average, people who complete HE **earn more over their lifetime** (one study showed graduates earn about **35%** more than those who didn't).

More importantly, you might access careers you care about, whether that's teaching, social work, science – you name it.

- 👉 **Independence & life experience:** Going to uni often means a new adventure – possibly moving to a new city, meeting people from all over, and learning to live on your own. It's a safe way to step into adult life with lots of support around you.

- 👤 **Make new friends and connections:** You'll meet people in your course, join clubs or sports, and maybe connect with other learners with additional needs. Many students say they make lifelong friends at university.

- 👤 **Support for your goals:** Universities and colleges have tons of resources – libraries, mentors, career advisers – to help you succeed.

Importantly, every university has a Disability Support Service (sometimes called Accessibil-

ity or Student Support) dedicated to arranging any help you need – like note-takers, sign language interpreters, assistive technology, mentoring, counselling, etc. (We'll talk more about support services later.)

You're not alone – there are many people and services to help you reach your goals.

💡 Key Points:

- ✅ Higher Education refers to any education or training after finishing school/college (post-18), including university degrees, higher-level courses at colleges, and higher or degree apprenticeships.
- ✅ There are many types of HE qualifications (e.g. Bachelor's degrees, Foundation degrees/HNDs, HNCs, apprenticeships). Different paths can lead to a higher qualification – choose what suits you best.
- ✅ As a disabled student, you have the right to support and reasonable adjustments in any HE path, and universities/colleges cannot discriminate against you because of your disability. Pick the subject and route that interest you, knowing support will be there.
- ✅ HE is different from school: you'll have more independence and will focus on the subjects you love, rather than a broad range. You'll need to manage your own time more, but you'll also be treated like an adult (with support available when you need it).
- ✅ HE can be very rewarding – it can improve your career opportunities, allow you to study your passion, help you become more independent, and introduce you to new friends and experiences. There are plenty of resources and support systems to help you thrive.

Higher Education in Further Education (HE in FE)

Not all Higher Education happens on a big university campus. You can gain higher-level qualifications through other routes that might suit you better. One of these routes is studying at a local college. This is called “Higher Education in Further Education,” or HE in FE.

It means you could study for a university-level qualification (like a foundation degree, HND, or even a full bachelor’s degree) in a smaller, more familiar college environment, possibly closer to home. Often, these courses are run by the college in partnership with a university (so your degree is awarded by that partner university, even though you attend classes at the college).

Local examples: In West Yorkshire, for instance, colleges such as Bradford College and University Centre Leeds (Leeds City College) offer full degree programmes on their campuses. These programmes are validated by partner universities (for example, Bradford College’s degrees are validated by the University of Bradford, and University Centre Leeds works with Leeds Beckett University and others).

This means you can earn a degree from a university while studying at a college, often with smaller class sizes and a more personal feel.

Why might you choose HE in FE? Some reasons students go this route include:

- ✓ **Smaller classes:** College-based HE courses usually have smaller class sizes, so you might get more individualised attention from tutors. This close-knit learning environment can be great if you thrive with more personal support.
- ✓ **Familiar setting:** A college campus can feel more familiar or less overwhelming than a large university. If you experience anxiety or prefer a quieter setting, a smaller campus might be more comfortable.
- ✓ **Flexible entry requirements:** Entry requirements for college-based HE courses can sometimes be more flexible, especially if you’ve done vocational qualifications (like BTECs) rather than A-levels.
- ✓ **Easier transition:** If you’re already studying at the college for your post-16 courses, continuing there for HE means the staff already know you and your support needs. This continuity can make the move to HE smoother, since you’re staying in an environment where you’re known.

Keep in mind: if you study a degree at a college, you're **still** a Higher Education student. In most cases you'll apply through UCAS for these courses just like you would for university (a few colleges might have their own application for certain courses, but typically UCAS is the route). You'll also still be eligible for student finance and Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) on these courses. At the end, you graduate with a recognised degree or HE qualification, just as you would from a university.


The support you receive might be organised a bit differently – for example, a college might have a smaller disability support team than a big university – but **they still must provide reasonable adjustments**. Many colleges running HE courses have excellent support in place for disabled students. It's worth checking what each college offers in terms of support and accessibility when you research your options, so you feel confident they can meet your needs.



💡 Key Points:

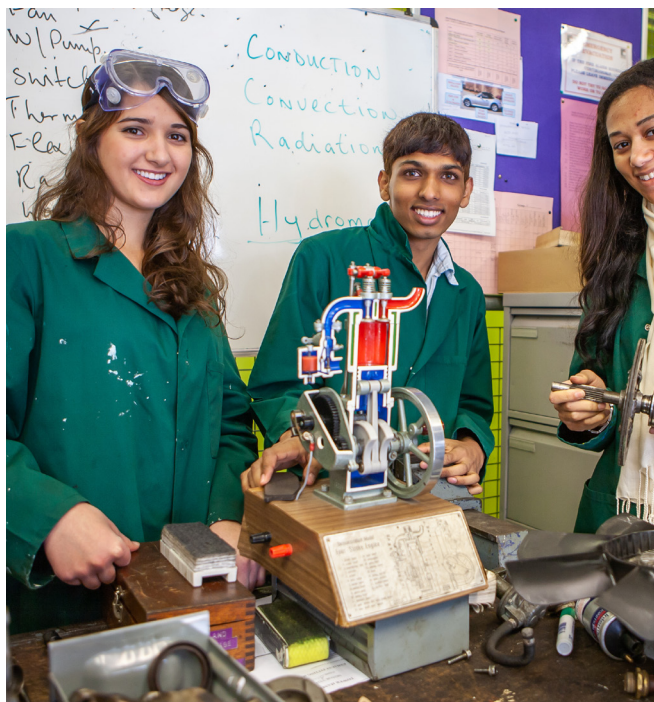
- ✓ **HE in FE** means doing a university-level course at a college (often in partnership with a university). This is an alternative to studying at a large university campus.
- ✓ Benefits of HE in FE can include smaller classes, a more familiar and less overwhelming environment, potentially more flexible entry requirements, and a smoother transition (especially if you continue at a college you know).
- ✓ If you choose a college for HE, you will still apply through UCAS in most cases, get the same Student Finance and DSA support, and end up with a recognised degree or qualification from a university.
- ✓ Colleges have a responsibility to support disabled students just like universities do. Their support services might be smaller, but they will offer reasonable adjustments. Always check what support is available at each institution when deciding where to study.

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs):

 HNCs and HNDs are bite-sized HE qualifications usually offered at colleges. An **HNC** is a one-year Level 4 course, and an **HND** is a two-year Level 5 course. They are very practical and career-focused. Often, you can 'top up' an HND (or a two-year Foundation Degree) with an additional year at a university to earn a full bachelor's degree.

👉 For example, you might do an HND in Business or Engineering at a local college, then join the final year of a university degree course later. Or, you can use your HNC/HND to go straight into a related job and start your career earlier.

These qualifications are great if you want a more hands-on approach or aren't ready to commit to three years at a university right away.



Higher and Degree Apprenticeships

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships allow you to gain a qualification while working, but there are key differences between them:

✓ **Higher Apprenticeships (Level 4-5):** These apprenticeships provide qualifications up to the equivalent of a foundation degree (such as a Higher National Certificate or Diploma). They're a great stepping stone into Degree Apprenticeships or skilled employment.

✓ **Degree Apprenticeships (Level 6-7):** A Degree Apprenticeship lets you work and study at the same time to achieve a full bachelor's or even a master's degree. You'll be employed by a company and typically study one day a week (or in blocks) at a university or college. Your employer and the government cover the tuition costs – **so you earn a salary and don't pay tuition fees.**

Degree Apprenticeships usually take longer than a traditional degree (often 4 years instead of 3 for a bachelor's), and you might not get the full-time campus life experience, but you will graduate with both a degree and **real work experience.**

💡 For example, you could do a **Degree Apprenticeship in Digital Marketing:** during the week, you work at a marketing company, and maybe one day a week, you attend classes at a university to study marketing theory. By the end, you'll have a degree in Marketing, on-the-job experience, and **no student loans** to pay.

This route is ideal if you like the idea of being in the workforce and studying simultaneously. However, **places can be competitive**, especially for fields like engineering, medicine, law, and computer science.

Unlike full-time university degrees, there is **no fixed entry route** into higher-level and degree apprenticeships.

Employers set their own requirements, and applications are made directly to companies, not through UCAS. Some employers may look for A-Levels, T-Levels, BTECs, or relevant work experience.

Where to Find Degree and Higher Apprenticeships

To explore apprenticeship vacancies and entry requirements, check:

- 👉 The [Office for Students website](#) (for general information)
- 👉 The [Government's Apprenticeships website](#) (for current vacancies)
- 👉 [UCAS Career Finder](#) (for employer-led apprenticeships)

(Plus, there are also options like online or part-time study if you need more flexibility – some people do their degrees through distance learning or evening/ weekend classes. The key is: **there's no single "right" way to do HE!**)

As you can see, there are many pathways to get a higher-level qualification beyond the traditional full-time university route. Think about what environment and style of learning works best for you – whether it's a large university, a smaller college setting, or learning while working. **All of these routes lead to Higher Education success, just via different paths.**

💡 Key Points:

- ✓ Higher & Degree Apprenticeships combine work with study. You have a job, earn a salary, and work towards a Level 4–5 qualification (higher apprenticeship) or a full degree (degree apprenticeship) at the same time.
- ✓ Your tuition is paid by the employer/ government, so you won't take out student loans for fees – and you'll gain several years of work experience by the time you finish.
- ✓ Entry into apprenticeships can be competitive and the application is like a job application (with CVs, interviews). There's no UCAS for apprenticeships – you apply to employers directly, and openings can appear at various times of the year.
- ✓ The apprentice life is different from being a full-time campus student. You'll spend most of your week working and will have less time on campus, so you might miss some of the social aspects of uni.
- ✓ If you like the idea of practical learning and avoiding student loans, apprenticeships are worth exploring. Check the official apprenticeship vacancy sites and be proactive in your search. And if an apprenticeship isn't for you, remember there are other flexible options (like distance learning or part-time study) to reach your higher education goals.

Busting Myths & Worries

Heard people say confusing things about university? Let's clear up a few myths that often worry students. We want you to have **the facts** so you feel more confident.

✗ **Myth 1:** "Higher Education is only for people who are good at academic subjects – not for people struggled in school"

✓ **Reality!**

There are lots of different courses and teaching styles—some hands-on, some with fewer exams. Disability support teams, study skills sessions, and tailored adjustments (like lecture capture or assistive software) can make a huge difference.

💡 **What to do:** Research different courses, check the course content and learning style to see if it suits you. Contact the disability service at universities you're interested in to ask what support is available.

✗ **Myth 2:** "You can only get a degree if you study at university."

✓ **Nope! You can get a degree in lots of different ways.**

While many students go to university, you can also study for a degree at a local college, in a university centre, or even while working! Options include:

Higher Education in Further Education (HE in FE): Some colleges offer full degrees in a smaller, more familiar environment than a big university.

Degree Apprenticeships: You can work and study at the same time.

Online and Part-Time Degrees: Some courses allow you to study remotely or alongside a job.

💡 **What to do:** Think about what works best for you – whether that's a traditional university setting, a local college, or an apprenticeship.

✗ **Myth 3:** "I should just get a job instead of university, i'll earn more"

✓ **Actually, research shows that graduates earn more in the long run.**

Studies show that, on average, people who complete Higher Education earn about 35% more than those who don't. That's because many jobs that require a degree come with higher salaries and more career progression opportunities.

💡 **What to do:** Consider your long-term future. Higher Education can open doors to better-paying careers, more job stability, and roles that interest you – but if going straight into work is the best choice for you, that's okay too! Just make sure you explore all options before deciding.



✗ **Myth 4:** “You can only apply to study in one place.”

✓ **Reality** – Through UCAS, you can apply to up to five courses! That means you can mix and match subjects, universities, and backup options. Most people apply to a mix of ambitious, realistic, and safe choices.

💡 **What to do:** Apply to a range of places – that way, you have backup options if your first choice doesn’t work out. Many students apply to both a “dream” university and a safer backup choice to keep their options open!

✗ **Myth 5:** “Having a large student loan will stop me from getting a mortgage.”

✓ **Reality!** Student loans are not like normal loans – they don’t show up on your credit score and don’t work the same way as car loans or credit card debt. The Council of Mortgage Lenders confirms that student loans have little to no impact on getting a mortgage.

💡 **What to do:** Visit [MoneySavingExpert](#) where they provide more example about student loans. Remember—grants like DSA and some bursaries don’t need repaying.

✗ **Myth 6:** “If I tell them about my disability, I won’t get an offer”

✓ **Reality** – Disclosing your disability won’t harm your application. In fact, it helps you get support earlier. UCAS sends your disclosure to a support team, not the admissions tutor. To get Disabled Students’ Allowance or adjustments, you need to disclose.

💡 **What to do:** Tick the disability box on UCAS, and mention it in your personal statement if you’re comfortable. After you apply, get in touch with the university’s disability team and apply for DSA through Student Finance. We will talk more about that later on in this pack.

💡 Key Points:

- ✓ Don’t let common myths scare you off – there are lots of ways to succeed in HE, even if school was tough, and plenty of support is available.
- ✓ You don’t have to go to a traditional uni if that’s not for you – degrees can be earned through local colleges, apprenticeships, or online study too.
- ✓ Higher Education can improve your career options, but it’s okay if it’s not for everyone. Do your research on the careers you want.
- ✓ You can apply to multiple universities/ courses (up to 5 via UCAS), increasing your chances of getting an offer.
- ✓ Student loan debt works differently – you repay only if and when you earn enough, and it won’t cripple your finances. Plus, you might get grants or bursaries you don’t pay back.
- ✓ Always be open about your disability in applications: it won’t affect admissions decisions, but it will ensure you get the support you need to succeed.

Step-by-Step: Your Journey to University

Okay, now let's get into the practical steps of moving from where you are now (Year 11–13, or in college) to actually starting at a university or HE course. We'll break this process down into stages, with a rough timeline for each. Everyone's journey can be a bit different, but these are the typical stages most students will go through on the way to Higher Education.

Key Points:


The road to university can be divided into key stages: **exploring your options, applying to your chosen courses, arranging student finance, finding accommodation, and preparing for the transition to university life**. We'll cover each of these stages step by step.


1. Explore Your Options (Research Stage)


Timing: **1–2 years before you want to start university**. For example, if you plan to start university in the autumn after Year 13, you should start researching in Year 12. (If you're starting later or have less time, don't panic – you can still do these steps, just try to be thorough.) This stage is all about discovering what's out there. Think of it like window-shopping for your future!

In the research stage, you'll be asking: What subject do I want to study? What courses are available? Where could I study?


What to do:


 **Think about subjects and careers that interest you.** What do you enjoy learning about? What kind of job would you like in the future? Make a list of fields or courses that spark your interest (for example, "sports science," "social work," "business," "nursing," "graphic design," etc.). It's okay if you have a few ideas or are unsure – this is normal!

 **Research courses and universities/colleges.** Use websites like [UCAS.com](https://www.ucas.com) or [The Uni Guide](#) to search for courses in your interest areas. Each course listing will tell you what grades or qualifications you need (the entry requirements), what you'll study, and how it's taught.

 **Look at different universities and HE-in-FE colleges** – Visiting universities and colleges (in person or virtually) is super helpful. Open days let you see the campus, accommodation, and facilities, and you can talk to staff and students. As a disabled student, open days are a chance to ask specific questions like: “Can I see an example of an accessible hall room?” “How do you support students with [your condition]?” Often, universities will have disability support staff available at open days. If travelling is hard, check for virtual tours or webinars – many institutions offer these.

Talk to people: Discuss your ideas with people you trust – a parent/carer, a teacher or SEND coordinator, a careers adviser. They can offer suggestions or things to think about. If possible, speak with current students or recent graduates (maybe through your school or online forums). You can also find communities online: for example, [The Student Room forums](#) or YouTube vlogs where students share their experiences (including disabled students talking about university life). Hearing others’ stories can give you insight (just remember every student’s experience is different).

 **Note the support on offer:** While you explore universities/colleges, also look into their support services. Do they have a **dedicated disability support office** page on their website? What kinds of accommodations do they mention? (For example, do they use lecture capture technology? Do they offer mentoring or peer support for disabled students? Are there specific programmes for mental health support?) Seeing how proactive a university is about support can be part of your decision.

 **Consider location and environment:** Think about whether you want to stay close to home or move away, and what environment suits you. If you have mobility issues, would a compact campus be easier than a spread-out one? Is public transport in that city accessible? If you have regular medical needs, is there a good hospital or specialist nearby? Also consider the campus vibe – do you prefer a bustling city university or a quieter town? There’s no right or wrong answer – just what fits you best.



💡 Key Points:

- ✓ Start exploring your options early (Year 12 is a good time if you plan to go to uni after Year 13). But even if you're close to applying, take time to research thoroughly.
- ✓ Identify subjects and courses that interest you. Don't shy away from something you love – there may be a way to pursue it with the right support.
- ✓ Attend open days (or online tours) and ask questions, especially about support and accessibility. Seeing campuses and talking to staff can really help you figure out if you'd be comfortable there.
- ✓ Check what grades or qualifications you'll need for the courses you like, and look at a range of options (some that match your expected grades and maybe one or two higher if you want to aim high). Have a backup plan too.
- ✓ Research how each university or college will support you as a disabled student. A place that actively welcomes and supports students with additional needs can make a big difference in your experience.



Decide on Your Course & Where to Apply (Application Stage) 🎓

Timing: Typically **autumn of the year before** you start (around September – January of Year 13 if aiming for entry after school). Some courses have earlier deadlines (like Oxford, Cambridge or medicine/vet courses have an October deadline in Year 13).

What to do:

✍️ **Narrow down your choices.** From your research, pick up to **5 courses** you want to apply for. They can be at different universities, or you might apply to a couple of courses at one uni – any combo, up to five choices. It's good to have a range – for example, some “aspirational” choices (higher entry requirements) and some “safe” choices (lower requirements you're confident to meet).

Get your application ready on UCAS.

UCAS is the online system for UK university applications. You'll need to create an account **and fill in your details, education, and** course choices. The important parts are:

📄 **Personal Statement:** This is a big part of your application. It's a ~500-1000 word essay about why you want to study your chosen subject and why you'd be a great student. You talk about your interests, achievements, maybe career goals. Don't stress – it's okay to mention challenges you've overcome if you want to, but you don't have to. Focus on showing enthusiasm for the course. Get a teacher or adviser to help proofread it.

👁️ **Reference:** A teacher or tutor will write a recommendation for you. Make sure whoever is writing it knows about any challenges you've had that might have affected grades.

✓ **Fill out the UCAS application:** You'll enter your personal details, education, and your course choices into the UCAS online form. In the section about disabilities/special needs, remember to disclose your disability (as we discussed earlier). Select the option that best describes your situation from the list and provide a few details if asked (for example, "I have dyslexia and use text-to-speech software"). This information is confidential and only used to arrange support, not to evaluate your academic ability.

👤 **Special arrangements (if needed):** If your course requires an interview, test, or audition (common in courses like art, music, drama, or some teaching degrees), and you need any accommodations (like wheelchair access, a sign language interpreter, extra time for a test, etc.), be sure to inform the university as early as possible. They will arrange the necessary adjustments. You can usually indicate this on the application or by emailing the admissions office.

🔍 **Apprenticeship applications (if also doing these):** Applying for apprenticeships is separate – it involves looking for openings and applying to companies (often with a CV and interview). You can work on those alongside your UCAS application if you're considering both paths. Just be mindful of those deadlines too, which can vary.

📅 **Submit before the deadline:** For most courses, the UCAS deadline is in January (mid-January of the year you'll start in autumn). Mark it on your calendar and try to submit before that. (If you're applying to Oxbridge or medicine/dentistry, your deadline is

earlier – October in the year before.) After you submit, UCAS sends your application to your chosen universities. Then you wait for offers, which usually come through late winter to spring.

📅 **After submitting:** Keep track of your UCAS login and check your email (and UCAS Track, the online portal) regularly. Universities might contact you through the portal or email. It can take weeks or months to hear back from all your choices, so don't be discouraged if you don't get immediate responses. If you get invited to interviews or open days for offer-holders, try to attend (and arrange adjustments if needed). Once you have decisions, you'll choose a **Firm** choice (your first pick) and an **Insurance** choice (your backup) from any offers you receive – but that comes a bit later in spring.

📚 **Contextual offers & scholarships:** Some universities or organisations have special access schemes or programmes for students from certain backgrounds (like disabled learners). These might give extra mentoring, or an interview guarantee, or a lower grade offer. Look up if the universities on your list have something like "access or progression schemes" and apply for it if so – these can only help you.



💡 Key Points:

- ✓ You can choose up to 5 courses to apply for through UCAS. It's a good idea to pick a mix – some that match your predicted grades, and maybe one or two that are a bit more ambitious. Try not to choose only one type of course or university – give yourself a few different options.
- ✓ Craft a strong personal statement that shows your enthusiasm for the subject and any relevant experience or skills. Have someone you trust review it. Mention your disability only if you want to highlight how it's shaped you (totally optional).
- ✓ Make sure your school/college reference will support your application. Let your referee know about any challenges you've overcome or support needs so they can include positive context if appropriate.
- ✓ Fill in the UCAS application carefully, including the disability section (so support can be arranged for you). Submit it by the deadline (most often January 15). There's a small fee, so have a payment method ready.
- ✓ If your course has interviews or auditions, inform the university ahead of time about any accommodations you'll need – they will arrange them.
- ✓ After applying, be patient. Offers may come at different times. Once you hear back, you'll get to choose a firm and insurance offer. If things don't go to plan, remember there's [Clearing](#) and other options – but hopefully, with good preparation, you'll have offers in hand!

“Knowing I'd get the support I needed in place because I shared my disability on the application made the whole process less stressful.”



3. Student Finance

Timing: Around spring (February – April) before you start the course. You usually apply for finance in the spring after you’ve applied to uni (you don’t need a confirmed place to apply for student finance – you can use your first choice and adjust later if needed).

What this stage is about:

In England, tuition fees are about **£9,535 per year** for most courses, and you’ll have living costs like rent, food, etc. The good news: there’s **financial support** so you don’t have to pay these up front. At this stage, you apply for your student loans and any extra support like **Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA)** to cover study costs which undergraduate and postgraduate students can get up to £27,783 a year for support which does not need to be paid back.

Key steps for funding:

Apply to Student Finance:

In England, you apply through Student Finance England (SFE) online. The application will ask for your course and university (if you haven’t decided your firm choice yet, use the one you think is most likely – you can update it later). You’ll also provide details about your household income (usually your parents’ income, unless you qualify as independent). Based on that, they’ll calculate your **Tuition Fee Loan** (which covers your course fees, paid directly to the uni) and your **Maintenance Loan** (to help with living costs, paid to you in termly installments). You don’t start repaying these loans until after you finish the course and are earning above a certain amount.

Apply for Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA):

On the student finance application, there will be a question asking if you want to apply for DSA. Make sure to tick yes (and there may be a separate form or section for details about your disability). DSA is an extra fund **(non-repayable)** to **cover study-related disability costs:** for example, specialist equipment (like a laptop with assistive software or a Braille display), a note-taker or mentor, disability-related travel costs, etc.

After applying, you’ll need to provide evidence of your disability (like a doctor’s letter or diagnostic report).

In many cases, you’ll then be invited to a **Needs Assessment** – an appointment with a specialist to discuss what support you need at uni. Don’t worry, it’s not a test – it’s to make sure you get the right equipment and help. The assessor will write a report recommending support for you, which SFE will then approve and fund. This process can take a couple of months, so applying earlier means your support will be ready by the time uni starts.

Submit your application early:

Apply for student finance by spring—SFE recommends applying by the end of May to ensure your funding is ready for the start of term. You’ll get a summary of your loans and grants, and can request changes if needed. For DSA, send your evidence early and book your Needs Assessment promptly to avoid delays with equipment or support.

Look into bursaries and scholarships:

Many universities offer bursaries (like grants) for students from low-income families, and some have scholarships for things like academic achievement. There are also external grants, such as those from the



[Snowdon Trust](#) for disabled students. These can give you extra money you don't need to pay back.

Check your chosen universities' websites for bursaries or scholarships – some are automatic, others you apply for. You can also search for charitable grants on the [Turn2Us website](#).

Repayments

So lets understand repayment (but don't panic about it now): Student loans feel huge, but the system is designed so that **if you don't earn enough, you don't pay.**

Currently, once you finish, you start repaying **only when you earn over about £25,000** a year (under Plan 5 terms). And then it's just a percentage of what you earn above that. For example, if you earned £30,000, you're £5,000 over the threshold, and you'd pay 9% of £5,000 over a year – which is about £37 a month. If you lose your job or earn under the threshold, **payments stop.**

After 40 years (for the newest plans), any remaining balance is wiped. **Also, student loan debt doesn't go on your credit record** like normal debt, and it **won't stop you from getting a mortgage** later in life (mortgage lenders mostly care about your monthly income, and since loan payments adjust with income, it's not seen the same as, say, credit card debt). So while it's important to be aware, try not to let the idea of "debt" scare you – it's more like a **graduate tax** that successful earners pay forward.

"Don't let finances hold you back. Student loans, grants, and bursaries are there to support you through university so you can focus on your studies."

Key Points:

- ✓ Apply for student finance in the spring before uni starts. This covers your tuition fees and provides a maintenance loan for living costs. You can apply before you've finalised your university choice.
- ✓ When applying, say yes to Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). DSA can fund things like assistive technology, equipment, or support staff to help with your studies. You'll need to provide evidence of your condition and attend a Needs Assessment, so start early to get support in place by the time term begins.
- ✓ Student loans are income-dependent: if your household income is lower, you get more support (and vice versa). You won't repay anything until after uni and only if you earn above a certain threshold.
- ✓ Look out for extra money: universities may offer bursaries or scholarships (which you don't pay back) based on your circumstances or achievements. Also check for charities that support disabled students with grants – every bit helps.
- ✓ Plan your budget. Know roughly what money you'll have coming in (loans, savings, bursaries) and what your expenses will be. If you foresee a shortfall, explore part-time work or talk to the uni about [hardship funds](#) or advice. Being financially prepared will reduce stress when you start uni.

4. Find the Right Place to Live (Accommodation Stage) 🏠

Timing: Spring/early summer before you start. Once you've decided on a firm university (and maybe an insurance choice), you'll start sorting out accommodation. Many universities open accommodation applications in the spring (around April or May for students starting in autumn). It's usually after you have an offer or once you firm your choice.

What this stage is about:

Deciding where you will live while studying. Your options typically are: living at home and commuting, or moving out and staying in student accommodation (like university halls of residence, or private housing). The goal is to find a living situation where you'll be comfortable and supported.

Considerations and steps:


🏠 Living at home vs. moving out:


First, decide whether you want to live at home or move out. There's no right or wrong choice. Staying home can save money and keep you close to family, support networks, and familiar medical services—especially important if you have ongoing health needs.

Moving out (e.g. into university halls) offers more independence and lets you experience student life more fully. Think practically: Is your commute easy and accessible? Would living at home feel isolating socially, or can you still join in? If managing care or medical equipment is easier at home, that might influence your choice—but many disabled students do both. Do what's right for you.


"Deciding whether to stay at home or move out was a big deal for me. I have sensory processing difficulties, so I was worried about noise in halls. I let the accommodation team know, and they found me a quieter flat. Being upfront about my needs really made the transition easier."
— Alex, first-year student





 **University halls of residence:** Most first-year students who move out go into halls. When applying (usually online), mention your disability and any specific requirements. Universities usually reserve accessible rooms for those who need them—e.g. wheelchair-accessible rooms, en-suite bathrooms for medical privacy, quiet floors, or visual fire alarms. Be clear about what's essential and what would help. You might need to provide medical documentation—that's normal.


 **Apply early and follow up:** Apply for accommodation as soon as it opens (after a firm offer). Accessible rooms are limited, so get in early. It's a good idea to follow up with the accommodation or disability team to confirm your needs have been noted. Many universities have a housing officer for disabled students who can support you directly.


 **52-week contracts:** If going home during holidays isn't practical, ask about 52-week contracts. These are often available to disabled students and care leavers and mean you won't need to move out each term.


 **Personal care support:** If you need a carer or personal assistant, speak to the accommodation office early. Many universities can arrange a live-in carer or frequent visits. Coordinate with local social services ahead of time, but having care needs doesn't stop you from living in halls.

 **Private accommodation:** Some students, especially in later years, choose private flats or houses. This can offer more choice, but there's less on-site support. If you consider this, ask the uni's accommodation service for help—they can advise on accessible and reputable options.

 **Visit (or take a virtual tour):** If possible, visit your accommodation to check things like kitchen access or distance from lectures. If not, ask for detailed photos or video tours showing accessibility features. Some unis offer early move-ins or orientation sessions for disabled students—take advantage if offered.

 **Ask for adjustments:** Don't hesitate to request things that would make life easier—like a second fridge for medication or a shower chair. Universities are used to these requests and want you to feel safe and comfortable.

 **Commuting needs:** If you're living at home, plan your journey. Check public transport or parking options—many unis offer priority parking for Blue Badge holders.

 **Stay flexible:** If your accommodation isn't working out, speak up—universities will try to help. You can also switch from home to halls later, or vice versa. Things can change, and there are always options.

Remember: The goal is to live somewhere you can rest, study, and be yourself. With planning and clear communication, you can find a setup that works for you.



5. Prepare for University Life (Transition Stage)

Timing: Summer before you start and the first weeks at uni.

You've got your place (yay!), sorted your funding and where you'll live. Now it's all about getting ready to actually go.

What this stage is about:


Making sure everything is set for a smooth transition – getting your support lined up, handling last-minute practical tasks, and mentally preparing for the exciting changes ahead.


"Over the summer, I reached out to the disability support team and it made such a difference. They helped me set everything up before I arrived – from exam arrangements to making sure my lecturers knew what I needed. It made me feel way more confident starting uni, knowing support was already in place and I wasn't figuring it all out alone."


Andy,

1st year Psychology student


Steps to consider:

 **Connect with the disability support office:** If you haven't already been in touch with your university's disability services by this point, now is the time. Over the summer, reach out and introduce yourself. **Confirm that they have all your documentation** (like your DSA Needs Assessment report or any evidence you sent). **Discuss the support plan they will put in place** – this often includes things like notifying your department of your exam accommodations or any classroom adjustments. **Ask questions:** How do I request lecture notes in advance? Who is my contact for issues? Will I get a written support plan? Knowing these details will make you feel more confident when term begins.


 **Register with a doctor and health services:** If you're moving to a new area, find out how to register with a local GP (doctor). Some universities have a health center on campus where you can sign up during induction week; others will advise you to register at a nearby clinic. If you take regular medications, make sure you have enough to cover the transition period and a plan to get refills near uni. For ongoing treatments (like therapy, physiotherapy, etc.), ask your current providers about transferring referrals to the new location. If you receive support from mental health services, ensure they know you're moving so they can connect you to services at or near the university. It's also a good idea to have a basic first aid kit and copies of important medical information (like vaccination records, repeat prescription forms) with you.

 **Prepare for the move:** Start planning what to pack and how to move your stuff. Universities often provide a checklist (e.g., “what to bring to halls”). Focus on essentials: clothing for the season, bedding (check bed size for your accommodation!), basic kitchen items if self-catered, any assistive devices or equipment you need (don’t forget chargers or adapters for them). If you got new equipment through DSA, make sure you know how to use it – and if training was offered (e.g., for software), schedule it. You don’t need to bring everything you own; space might be limited. Think about what will make your new place comfortable (maybe a familiar pillow or some photos). Also gather important documents: your ID/passport, university acceptance letter, student finance documents, accommodation contract, medical insurance card, etc., and keep them in a folder.


 **Build your independent living skills:** University might be the first time you’re fully in charge of daily tasks. Use the summer to practise skills you’ll need. If you haven’t done much cooking, try learning a few simple recipes or how to use a microwave safely. Practise doing laundry if you haven’t (sorting colours, using a machine). If budgeting is new to you, outline a simple weekly budget for yourself. If there are tasks you physically can’t do, think of alternatives or supports (e.g., if you can’t carry laundry to a laundrette, is there a laundry service or could a friend help in exchange for something you can do?). Knowing you can handle day-to-day life (or have a plan for assistance) will boost your confidence.

 **Connect with peers:** Some universities have mentoring schemes where current students reach out to newbies over the summer – take advantage of that if offered.

 **Plan for Welcome Week (Freshers’ Week):** Universities have an orientation or freshers’ week full of events, fairs, and induction sessions. Look out for the schedule (they often send it in advance or put it online). Mark any important academic sessions (department introductions, registration times) and fun events you’re interested in (the club/society fair is a must to find groups to join). Also see if there are any tailored events – many campuses now offer specific welcome events for disabled students or “quiet” alternatives to some of the louder parties. Decide what you want to attend, but don’t overload yourself. It’s okay to take breaks during freshers’ week – it can be overwhelming, so pace yourself.

 **Backup plans and knowing support:** It’s normal to worry about the “what ifs.” What if my health acts up? What if I struggle with the work?

Things you can do to help:

 **Identify the support resources:** you’ll have a personal tutor or adviser for academic issues – they’re the first person to go to if you’re having academic difficulties. The uni will have a counselling service or mental health support if you find yourself feeling anxious or low – know how to contact them. The disability service is there for any disability-related challenges – keep their contact handy. Also note the nearest urgent care or hospital for

emergencies, just in case. Having a plan ("If I encounter X problem, I can reach out to Y") will make you feel more secure.

😊 **Attitude:** This is an exciting time. It's completely normal to feel nervous – almost everyone does, even if they don't show it. Trust that you've prepared as much as you can. You've arranged support, sorted finances, and practised skills. University is a new chapter, and it's okay that not everything is known yet. Be proud of how far you've come. If possible, give yourself a small break or treat before the start – enjoy time with family or friends, or just relax, so you go in with a fresh mind. Some students like to visit campus a day or two before things kick off (or arrive early on move-in day) to quietly explore – if you have the opportunity, it can help you get your bearings without the crowds.

Remember, you're not expected to figure everything out on day one. The first term is a learning curve for everyone. With the groundwork you've laid and the support networks in place, you're in a great position to thrive. Take a deep breath – you've got this!



💡 Key Points:

- ✓ In the summer before uni, get in touch with your university's disability services to confirm your support plan and ask any last questions. Make sure all your evidence and DSA arrangements are in order so support is ready when you arrive.
- ✓ Sort out health logistics: register with a local doctor, ensure you have enough medication (and a way to get more), and transfer any ongoing medical care to your university town so you're not caught off guard once you move.
- ✓ Prepare practically: gather what you need to bring (including any assistive equipment or important documents). Practise any independent living skills (cooking, laundry, budgeting) you're unsure about. It's okay to ask family or friends to help you learn – better to feel prepared now than stuck later.
- ✓ Engage with the university community, reach out to future classmates or roommates, and check if there are special orientation events for disabled students. Knowing a few friendly faces (even virtually) can ease first-day nerves.
- ✓ Plan your welcome week so you hit essential inductions and some fun events, but remember to pace yourself – it's a busy time and you're allowed to take breaks. Identify key support contacts (personal tutor, disability adviser, student services) so you know where to turn if you encounter any problems.

You're not alone: Support is there for you

Starting HE is a big step, but remember you have a whole network of support available. Universities want their students to succeed and be well, and there are many people and services ready to help you academically, personally, and with your health. Here's a rundown of support you can expect:

♥ **University Disability Support Services:**

Every university or HE college has a team to support disabled students (often called Disability Services, Accessibility, or Inclusion). They help arrange reasonable adjustments like extra exam time or accessible lecture materials. With your consent, they'll create a support plan and share it with your lecturers. They can also help if something goes wrong – like fixing accessibility issues on campus. Support might include note-takers, study skills tutors, or mentors, through DSA or the university. They're also a great source of advice, equipment, and campus guidance. Get in touch early – they're there to help you succeed and provide disability-related support.

👤 **Academic support (tutors and study skills)**

You'll have a **personal tutor** or **academic adviser** to support you throughout your course – they can help with course issues, personal challenges, or arranging extensions. Universities also offer study skills support like workshops or one-to-one help with essays, note-taking, and time management. Lecturers also hold office hours where you can ask questions and get extra guidance. If you use assistive tech, IT or library staff may offer training to help you get the most out of it.

👐 **Health and wellbeing services:**

Most universities offer access to doctors, counselling services, and mental health or wellbeing teams. Counselling is free and confidential – register early if you think you might need it. Mental health advisers can support you if you have ongoing conditions, helping coordinate care and academic support. Look out for stress workshops, group sessions, or even therapy dogs during exam season! Chaplaincies and faith centres also offer pastoral support for all students – you don't need to be religious to reach out.

External Support Networks:

Support from family, friends, or services back home can still be important at uni. Stay in touch with your Local Authority if you have a social worker or care package – support might continue but do double check.

Disability charities like Disability Rights UK offer advice (including a Disabled Students Helpline), and condition-specific organisations (like Mind or the National Autistic Society) have resources and peer support. If you're struggling to get the help you need at uni, these organisations can offer advice or advocate for you.

Above all, remember: asking for help is not a weakness – it's a smart strategy. Whether you need academic advice, personal support, or just someone to talk to, there are people ready and willing to help.

University staff want students to succeed and be happy. If the first person you ask doesn't have the answer, they can usually point you to someone who does. You're never alone in finding a solution.

With all these support systems in place, you have a safety net. You've overcome challenges before, and with the right help in place, you're set not just to get by, but to truly thrive in higher education!



💡 Key Points:

- ✓ Universities have dedicated disability support teams to ensure you get the adjustments you need – use them! They will coordinate things like extra time, accessible materials, and other accommodations for you.
- ✓ You'll have academic support like personal tutors and study skill resources. Don't hesitate to ask your lecturers questions or seek help if you're struggling with coursework – that's what office hours and support centers are for.
- ✓ **There are many opportunities to connect with fellow students** – from disability student networks to clubs and societies. Fellow students can offer friendship, advice, and a sense of community. You're likely to find others with similar experiences if you reach out.
- ✓ **Your health and wellbeing are a priority:** free counseling, mental health support, and health services are available on campus. If you're feeling mentally or physically unwell, help is on hand – you don't have to handle it alone.
- ✓ **Keep using your outside support too:** stay in touch with family or friends who support you, and make sure any external care or benefits are transitioned smoothly to university.
- ✓ Ultimately, there's a whole network rooting for you – from tutors to support staff to peers. If you encounter a problem, there is someone who can help. Don't be afraid to speak up and use the support available – it can turn a tough situation into a manageable one.

Your Next Steps Checklist

That was a lot of info – but don't worry, you don't have to memorise it. Here's a handy **checklist** of next steps to keep things simple. You can refer back to this as you move forward:

- ✓ **Research courses and careers** that interest you. Jot down 2-5 potential courses or subjects.
- ✓ **Look up universities/colleges** offering those courses. Check entry requirements and disability support for each.
- ✓ **Attend an open day** (in person or virtual) or contact admissions to get a feel for the places you like.
- ✓ **Talk to your parents, teachers, or advisers** about your plans and ask for any help you need in the process.
- ✓ **Apply through UCAS and Share Your Needs** Start your UCAS application early – register on the Hub, fill in your details, and work on your personal statement with time to get feedback. Make sure to tick the disability box and briefly explain your condition. This won't affect offers but helps universities plan support. Let your referee know anything important to include, like challenges you've overcome.
- ✓ **Apply to up to 5 courses** on UCAS by the deadline (mid-Jan, or earlier if needed). Double-check all details, then hit submit!
- ✓ **Apply for Student Finance and DSA** Apply as soon as student finance opens (usually February). You can update your uni choice later. Tick the box for DSA, upload any evidence, and book your Needs Assessment promptly.

- ✓ **Apply for scholarships/bursaries** Check your universities for scholarships or bursaries – including those for low income, disabilities, or specific subjects. Look at external options too, like the [Snowdon Trust](#) or [Turn2Us](#). Note deadlines and apply if eligible.



- ✓ **Firm up your university choice** (when offers come in). Once you decide which offer to accept, complete the steps with UCAS to accept your firm (and insurance) offer.
- ✓ **Secure accommodation:** Once you've accepted a firm offer, start looking at accommodation (usually spring/summer). Apply early and include any accessibility needs. If you're living at home, inform the university if needed and plan your commute.
- ✓ **Prepare for moving:** Sort out what you need to bring, sort transportation for move-in day, and take any life-skills prep you feel you need (cooking, budgeting practise, etc.). Your personal adviser or social worker can help you plan for this transition.
- ✓ **Register with a GP** near the university and any support services you might need (counselling, etc.) once you arrive.
- ✓ **Enjoy Freshers' Week** – go to events, meet people, and sign up for any clubs that sound fun!
- ✓ **Settle into your studies:** Attend your classes, meet your tutors, and establish a routine. Don't hesitate to use academic support like tutoring centers or study groups.
- ✓ **Reach out when needed:** Check in with yourself as term goes on. If you're struggling with anything, speak up early – your tutor, disability team, or student support can help. It's normal to face challenges, and asking for support is the best way through.

Finally: believe in yourself.

You've made it this far, and you've overcome challenges along the way. With the right preparation and support, you can absolutely thrive in Higher Education – academically, socially, and personally. Be proud of what you've achieved and excited for what's ahead. Good luck on your Higher Education journey!. 🎉



Useful Links

Here are some useful resources and links to help you along the way. (If you have a printed copy of this guide, you can search online for these titles.)

General Higher Education Information:

UCAS :University and colleges Admissions Service

UCAS is where you apply to most UK universities. The site has guides on:

- choosing courses
- Writing your personal statement
- Key deadlines

Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY)

A group of local colleges and universities working together to support learners in West Yorkshire. Their website shares their members disability support webpages and open days.

👉 gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk

Disability Rights UK –

An annual guide for disabled students. Covers applying, funding, and support – with real student stories.

Also runs the Disabled Students Helpline (see below).

👉 disabilityrightsuk.org

Alternative Routes to Higher Education

Degree Apprenticeships

Office for Students

Explains how degree apprenticeships work – combining work and study.

👉 officeforstudents.org.uk

Find an Apprenticeship – Gov.uk

Search for higher or degree apprenticeships by area or industry.

👉 gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship

UCAS Apprenticeships Finder

Tool to search apprenticeships

👉 ucas.com

Finance and Funding

Student Finance England (SFE)

Apply for student loans and DSA (Disabled Students' Allowance).

👉 gov.uk/student-finance

👉 gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

Covers extra study costs linked to your disability. You can apply as part of your student finance application.

Turn2Us Grants Search

Find grants and extra funding based on your circumstances

turn2us.org.uk

Scholarship Search

Use sites like:

👉 [The Scholarship Hub](#)

Support and Wellbeing

Disabled Students Helpline (Disability Rights UK)

Get advice on your rights, applying for DSA, or university support:

☎ 0330 995 0414

✉ students@disabilityrightsuk.org

University Disability Support Pages

Once you know where you're applying, check each uni's website for:

👉 **Disability contacts**

👉 **What support they offer**

👉 **Transition or orientation events**

UCAS – Mental Health and Wellbeing
Advice and info about mental health at university.

👉 ucas.com

Mind – Student Mental Health
Tips for managing your mental health and knowing your rights.

👉 mind.org.uk

NHS – Going to University with a Health Condition

Guidance on staying well at uni, transferring care, or sorting prescriptions.

👉 nhs.uk





Bradford College



University of
HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring global professionals

